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**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Order Instituting Rulemaking to Consider the
Adoption of a General Order and Procedures
to Implement the Digital Infrastructure and
Video Competition Act of 2006.

R.06-10-005

REPLY COMMENTS

OF SUREWEST TELEVIDEO (U 6324 C)

ON PROPOSED DECISION MAILED JANUARY 16, 2007

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I. INTRODUCTION.

Pursuant to Rule 14.3(d) of the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, SureWest TeleVideo ("SWT") files these reply comments on the proposed decision ("PD") addressing implementation of the statutory provisions of the Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006 ("DIVCA").

In these reply comments, SWT identifies areas of agreement with other parties' opening comments outlining instances where the PD and draft general order exceed the provisions of DIVCA or where the PD and draft general order could be modified to provide more flexibility or to eliminate onerous, unintended outcomes. In particular, the Commission should make changes to the PD and draft general order in areas such as data reporting requirements, bonding, build-out, and definition of "telephone service area."

In opening comments, some parties perceive that the Commission's administration of DIVCA should track the historical regulation of public utilities that has been the Commission's primary obligation since its creation. However, starting with the law that the "holder of a state franchise shall not be deemed a public utility,"¹ it is clear that DIVCA presents a different role for the Commission. Not only do proposals to create extensive oversight and monitoring programs within the Commission run afoul of the non-utility status of video providers, those proposals exceed the explicit grant of authority provided to the Commission under DIVCA. SWT supports the Commission's adherence to DIVCA as well as its statements that it will not adopt proposals outside the scope of statutory authority and that it will only adopt regulations if they are necessary for enforcement of specific DIVCA provisions.

II. THE COMMISSION SHOULD FURTHER REFINE THE DRAFT GENERAL ORDER.

A. Applying Video Rules to All Affiliates is Too Broad.

In its opening comments, SWT suggested that applying new video rules to all affiliates of a state franchise holder exceeded the scope of DIVCA and proposed that the Commission should limit application of the new general order, in particular broadband reporting requirements, to those services which are provided over video facilities.² In its opening comments, Verizon California Inc. ("Verizon") expresses the same concern, arguing convincingly that DIVCA is limited to wireline-based services, facilities and companies.³ To address this issue, SWT concurs with Verizon's proposed fixed reflected

¹ Cal. Public Util. Code § 5820(c).

² SWT Opening Comments, p. 2.

³ Verizon Opening Comments, p. 4.

in Verizon's markup of the draft general order. Specifically, the word "wireline" should be inserted into Rule VI.B.1 prior to the word "Affiliates," or the Commission could specifically limit reporting requirements to wireline facilities, as SureWest suggested in its opening comments.

B. The Commission Should not Require a Pre-Application Process for Smaller Providers.

The PD would require smaller video providers who are not subject to the strict build-out requirements in Section 5890(b) and (e) to undertake a pre-application process to identify rigid build-out requirements.⁴ In its opening comments, the California Cable and Telecommunications Association ("CCTA") shared SWT's concerns that such a process is unnecessary.⁵ As CCTA's discussion demonstrates, applying video build-out requirements that rely on telephone service as the measuring stick when the company's primary line of business is offering video reveals the nullity of such standards. To apply a build-out requirement to an incumbent cable provider, for example, that says an incumbent cable provider must provide video service to each of its telephone customers within a reasonable time makes no sense because an incumbent cable provider only provides telephone service where its video facilities permit it to do so. The conclusion to draw from this outcome is that the Legislature must have intended the build-out requirement in Section 5890(c) to apply only to incumbent local exchange carrier ("ILECs") service areas where such carriers offer telephone service first and may add video services at a later time.

Based on these circumstances, SWT supports the principles underlying CCTA's comments and suggests the following. First, the Commission should declare in the PD that small incumbent cable companies do not need to undergo a pre-application process. Second, the Commission should retain flexibility in how a smaller ILEC demonstrates compliance with the "reasonable time" build-out standard reflected in Section 5890(c). If a small ILEC wishes to pursue a pre-application build-out evaluation with the Commission, that should be permitted. The Commission should also consider a separate phase to create safe harbor build-out standards that could apply to small ILECs. Ultimately, however, each small ILEC should be permitted to demonstrate that it is in compliance with the build-out requirements embodied in DIVCA by referencing its own unique circumstances.

C. The Definition of "Telephone Service Area" Should Rely on an Actual Footprint.

In its opening comments, CCTA echoes SWT's concerns regarding the definition of "Telephone Service Area."⁶ The draft general order currently defines the term to include the entire area covered by a

⁴ PD, pp. 153-155.

⁵ CCTA Opening Comments, pp. 4-7.

⁶ CCTA Opening Comments, p. 6 fn. 2, pp. 7-8.

certificate of public convenience and necessity, not just where a company is actually providing telephone service. Because of this overly broad definition, franchise holders would have to provide information to the Commission for areas in which they do not provide service. Furthermore, the overly broad definition would lead to an outcome under DIVCA that a CLEC with statewide telephone authority would have to provide video service to the entire authorized service area.⁷ As CCTA states, "the Legislature had no intent to *require* incumbent cable applicants, or other similarly situated CLECs, to expand their existing video service footprint throughout the state merely because their CPCN authorizes such service."⁸ To address this issue, the Commission should base the definition of "telephone service area" on the area in which a company actually provides telephone service, i.e., its existing network footprint.

D. Build-out Standards Should Apply to the Entire Franchise Area.

In AT&T California's ("AT&T's") opening comments, it requests that the Commission clarify that build-out requirements apply to the entire franchise area, and not separately to non-contiguous geographic areas within the entire franchise area.⁹ SWT agrees with the principle identified in AT&T's comments. A provider's compliance with DIVCA should be based on its deployment of video services within its entire franchise area and not on sub-sets of the franchise area.

E. Bonding Issues.

Two issues related to bonding arose in opening comments that are of particular interest to SWT. First, AT&T urges the Commission to clarify that the Commission does not intend to create authority in local jurisdictions to require bonds (or other similar security instruments) where such authority may not have previously existed, nor does it intend to suggest that local jurisdictions should require security instruments when they are not now currently doing so.¹⁰ SWT shares AT&T's concern. DIVCA does not, and the Commission rules should not, create further local authority in this area.

Second, several parties urge the Commission to introduce more flexibility into the security instrument requirements.¹¹ These include a guarantee by the parent company or letter of credit versus a bond requirement. In SWT's experience, local jurisdictions are satisfied with letters of credit, and SWT

⁷ See Cal. Public Util. Code § 5890(c) (offering video service to all customers within a "telephone service area" is a measurement of non-discrimination).

⁸ CCTA Opening Comments, p. 7 (emphasis in original).

⁹ AT&T Opening Comments, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ AT&T Opening Comments, pp. 2-4.

¹¹ CCTA Opening Comments, pp. 8-9; Small LEC Opening Comments, p. 7.

finds them more easily administered than bonds. The Commission should permit a franchise applicant to rely on a parent company's guarantee or a letter of credit in addition to a bond as part of the application process.

F. The Commission Should Recognize Differences between Census Standards and Service Areas.

Both AT&T and Verizon point out that service areas may not track census population measurement units referenced in DIVCA.¹² Consistent with these comments, the Commission should clarify that providers are not required to conform their service areas to population units created by the Census Bureau.

III. THE COMMISSION SHOULD RESIST EFFORTS TO APPLY TRADITIONAL REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS TO ITS VIDEO FRANCHISING ROLE.

A number of commenting parties purporting to represent consumer interests ignore the statutory framework of DIVCA and urge the Commission to adopt an array of proposals that would make video service providers regulated as if they were public utilities. Because DIVCA specifically states that video service providers are not public utilities, the Commission should not adopt those parties' proposals. Space does not permit SWT to refute each of the proposals. However, SWT does address the "cross-subsidy" issue, intervenor compensation, and the role of the Division of Ratepayer Advocates ("DRA"). To repeat a theme from SWT's comments at all stages of this proceeding, any rules the Commission adopts should recognize the limited authority granted to it under DIVCA to regulate video service providers.

A. The PD Properly Addresses the Cross-Subsidy Limitations in DIVCA.

In their opening comments, The Utility Reform Network ("TURN") and DRA urge the Commission to collect "highly detailed and disaggregated data" to ensure that cross-subsidization is not occurring.¹³ The defect in the TURN/DRA position is that they ignore the explicit language of DIVCA. Specifically, DIVCA prohibits a state franchise holder from raising the rate for residential, primary line, basic telephone service to finance the cost of deploying video service.¹⁴ DIVCA also places a freeze on that rate for two years, subject to adjustment for inflation.¹⁵ Relying on these two provisions, TURN/DRA apparently assume DIVCA intended the Commission to inject itself into every form of

¹² AT&T Opening Comments, pp. 5-6; Verizon Opening Comments, p. 10-11.

¹³ TURN Opening Comments, p. 4; *see also* DRA Opening Comments, pp. 8-12.

¹⁴ Cal. Public Util. Code § 5940.

¹⁵ Cal. Public Util. Code § 5950.

possible cross-subsidization imaginable. TURN/DRA are wrong. The only area properly subject to Commission scrutiny in its role as a video services franchisor are rate increases for basic residential telephone service that exceed inflation.

In fact, if the telephone service provider of a video franchise affiliate never raises its basic residential rate, there is no conceivable violation of Section 5940. The only point at which the Commission may concern itself is if the basic residential rate is increased greater than the aggregate inflation index. At that time, the Commission may consider undertaking an investigation if it deems necessary. However, TURN/DRA would impose onerous and costly reporting requirements in excess of the statutory authority granted in DIVCA based simply on their misplaced philosophical beliefs regarding cross-subsidization generally. TURN/DRA's proposals on the "cross-subsidy" issue should be rejected.

B. The PD Appropriately Denies Intervenor Compensation.

SWT believes the PD is correct to deny the availability of intervenor compensation in the context of franchise applications. First, video franchisees are not utilities and thus intervenor compensation related to video franchise matters are not contemplated under DIVCA. Second, DIVCA represents an effort to transfer the franchise process from local jurisdictions to a more centralized state administration. SWT is not aware of intervenor compensation that exists at the local level, and absent that precedent, it would be a stretch to assume that DIVCA intended intervenor compensation to now become available simply because the CPUC is administering the franchise process.

C. Role of DRA.

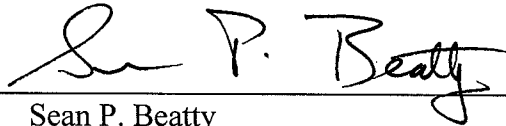
In response to DRA's concerns regarding limitations imposed upon it by the PD, SWT simply notes that the Commission should be directed by the explicit provisions of DIVCA. Based on the way DIVCA is drafted, and specifically Section 5900(k), it is clear that the Legislature did not intend DRA to operate unfettered in the realm of video service matters. SWT believes the PD's limitations can be justified under the narrow grant of authority provided DRA under DIVCA and no changes need to be made.

IV. CONCLUSION.

The Commission should make the modifications recommended in SWT's comments and proceed with the implementation of video franchising at its earliest opportunity.

Dated this 13th day of February, 2007, at San Francisco, California.

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE BY MAIL

I, Noel Gielegthem, declare:

I am a resident of the State of California, over the age of eighteen years, and not a party to the within action. My business address is COOPER, WHITE & COOPER LLP, 201 California Street, 17th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94111.

On February 13, 2007, I served the following REPLY COMMENTS OF SUREWEST TELEVIDEO (U 6324 C) ON PROPOSED DECISION MAILED JANUARY 16, 2007 by placing a true and correct copy thereof with the firm's mailing room personnel, for mailing in accordance with the firm's ordinary practices, addressed to the parties on the CPUC service list for Proceeding No. R. 06-10-005.

Copies were also hand delivered to Assigned ALJ Sullivan and Assigned Commissioner Chong.

Copies were also served via e-mail on those parties on the service list who provided an e-mail address.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on February 13, 2007, at San Francisco, California.



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